



Buying Clinic

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BUYING CLINIC

If you need buying advice on hardware and software, write to:

Buying Clinic
Computer Shopper
30 Cleveland Street
London W1T 4JD
or email:

clinic@computershopper.co.uk

PRINTERS MULTIFUNCTION PRINTING

MULTIFUNCTION MUDDLE



Q I am thinking of buying a multifunction peripheral. I need one that can produce good-quality prints from a PC and that has memory card slots. It also needs to work as a copier and fax. I have seen a Brother MFC620CN for just under £200; is this a good choice, or would you recommend another similarly priced product? I've heard I should buy a laser printer, because if you spill a drink on a laser printout you can wipe the liquid off and the print will still be there. What should I buy?

David Yarwood

A Multifunction peripherals fall into two groups: those that use an inkjet printer and those with a laser printer inside.

Laser printers are great if you need to print lots of documents quickly and cheaply, but they have disadvantages. Most importantly, they're far more expensive than inkjet products; we don't know of a colour laser multifunction device with a fax that costs less than £200. If you just want to print documents in black and white, you could consider Samsung's SCX-4521F. This costs around £220 including VAT, but has no memory card slots.

To print colour documents too, you'll need to choose an inkjet device. These are cheaper and are ideal for home use. Many can print good-quality photographs. We haven't reviewed Brother's MFC620CN, but our current favourite is HP's Photosmart 2610. This usually sells for between £175 and £190 including VAT. It has memory card



▲ HP's Photosmart 2610 can copy and fax and produces great prints

slots and a built-in fax. It produces high-quality prints, and its mono prints are cheap and quick. It also has a built-in Ethernet port, so you can quickly and easily connect it to a home network.

If you want waterproof prints, consider an Epson. Epson claims that its DuraBrite pigment inks are water-resistant. The Stylus CX6600 uses DuraBrite inks, but has no fax.

SCANNERS SPECIFICATIONS

I NEED A SCANNER FOR WAGE SLIPS

Q I am a self-employed residential landlord. I need to buy a good-quality portable scanner that can copy documents such as wage slips, which are often folded and flimsy, and passports.

I find photocopies are often poor quality, and tenants are reluctant to allow me to take their important documents home to scan. I need a small, handheld scanner or a thin flatbed scanner that I can connect to a

notebook, and which can be carried in a notebook backpack easily.

Paul Rhodes

A The smallest scanner available is the Planon Systems DocuPen R700. We reviewed this tiny scanner in *What's New, Shopper* August 2005. It's a thin metal wand that you roll over documents, and it can store files in its internal memory before transferring them to a PC.

Running this kind of scanner over crumpled documents could be tricky, though, as you need to roll it at a constant pace. A sensible alternative would be a thin USB scanner such as Canon's LiDE 60. This measures 40x259x375mm and draws power over USB, so you can just carry a notebook, the scanner and a USB cable. At around £60 including VAT, it's also far cheaper than the £140 DocuPen.



▲ The DocuPen is tiny, but might have trouble scanning crumpled documents

ADSL ROUTER ADSL2+

WHICH ADSL ROUTER?

Q I am getting ADSL and want a wireless router. What is the difference between ADSL2+ modems and ADSL routers? Will ADSL2+ routers work with normal ADSL?

Steven Marsley

A ADSL2+, which is being trialled at the moment, is designed to give faster download speeds. It should offer up to

12Mbit/s to subscribers who are up to 2.5km from the telephone exchange, and 25Mbit/s to those up to 1.5km away. By comparison, ADSL offers a maximum of 8Mbit/s to users who are no further than 1.5km from the exchange. ADSL2+ routers are backwardly compatible with ADSL,



◀ Ozenda's AR4505GW is reliable, affordable and should be fast enough for current requirements

so you can use one of these routers with a standard connection. But unless you have a particular model in mind, there's no reason to buy an ADSL2+ router at the moment.

ADSL2+ is likely to have a slow roll-out and will be expensive at first. The speeds it offers won't be needed by homes for some time, so we'd stick with standard ADSL for now. If you're looking for a reliable and affordable router, Ozenda's AR4505GW is a good choice. It costs £59 including VAT from www.ozenda.com.



PCS WINDOWS MEDIA CENTER

WANTED: MEDIA CENTER PC

Q I want my next PC to be used as a media centre rather than for games. Are there any PCs you can recommend that run Windows XP Media Center Edition? Will I also be able to record from my Sky Digital box, and are there bugs that plague it and prevent it working well? How can I transfer what I see on my PC to my TV?

Charles Woollin

A Media Center uses what Microsoft calls the '10-foot experience'. The interface is large enough that you can use it on a TV screen from your sofa using the remote control.

To connect it to your TV, you can use the S-video output from the graphics card. If you

have an LCD TV, you can use your graphics card's standard D-sub or DVI outputs to connect directly to it. Using an LCD TV means you can run Media Center at a higher resolution, so it will look better.

Using it with your Sky Digital box is no problem. You just need to connect the Sky box directly into the input of the Media Center. Media Center comes with a remote control cable that connects to your Sky box. It lets the Media Center change Sky channels automatically, so you can set it to record TV automatically. Getting it to work can be a pain, though, and you may have to go through a trial-and-error process to get it working.

With regular TV broadcasts, you can pause live TV, start playback before you've finished a recording or play a recorded TV show while you're



▲ Evesham's ebox2 provides all the benefits of Microsoft's Media Center for a decent price

recording a live show. You can also listen to music, play videos and view digital photos all through the same interface.

Media Center PCs can be quite expensive, but Evesham's ebox2 is good value and works well. It's available for £899 including VAT from www.evesham.com.

WIRELESS MIMO ROUTER

WHY GO MIMO?

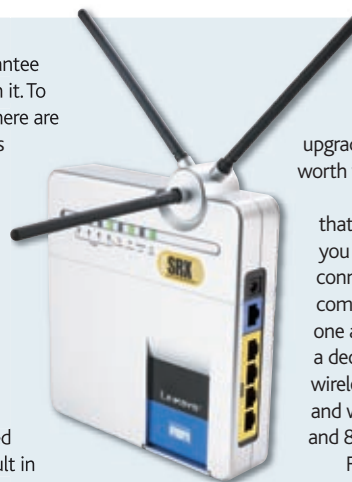
Q I am contemplating installing a wireless router for my home in order to avoid cables. MIMO seems to be the new thing, but I know that 802.11n is going to be introduced some time next year. I am in no rush. Do you think it's best to wait until it is introduced?

Hubert Davies

A Multiple-In, Multiple-Out, or MIMO, is becoming increasingly popular. Some MIMO devices, such as the Linksys WRT54GX, work very well. Unfortunately, there is no agreed standard for MIMO, so if you buy a

MIMO router there's no guarantee future products will work with it. To complicate matters further, there are three different MIMO systems currently available, and they work in very different ways.

We expect the next standard for wireless network devices, 802.11n, to be ratified in 2007. That is a long time to wait, but it's likely a draft will be published during 2006. This should give a good indication of which kind of technology will be used in 802.11n, and hopefully result in more compatible products being released. If you intend to install a network that you can



▲ Some MIMO products work very well, but there is currently no standard system

upgrade and add to over time, it may be worth waiting for this point.

In the meantime, though, remember that not everyone needs MIMO. If you just want to share an internet connection or transfer files between computers that are relatively close to one another, an 802.11g wireless setup is a decent option. An 802.11g router and wireless card should cost less than £100, and will be compatible with all 802.11g and 802.11b products on the market.

For more information on MIMO and 802.11n, turn to page 256 and read *How It Works*.

GPS IN-CAR NAVIGATION

WHERE AM I?

Q I want to buy a GPS navigation system I can use in my car and move from car to car. However, I am confused by all the different models and lists of specs. I have come up with a minimum list of specifications, including door-to-door navigation and speed camera locations. What should I buy?

PA Duffin



▲ TomTom's Go lets you move the device from car to car with you

A We think that TomTom's Navigator 3 is an excellent navigation system. It's available for Pocket PC, so you can use it with an existing handheld computer, but you will also need to buy a GPS receiver. The big advantage of building a navigation system this way is that you can upgrade easily to the latest version of the software.

If you do not have a Pocket PC, the TomTom Go series is a fine and very sensible choice. This combines the hardware and software in one package, which you can move from car to car as you need to, while running the same software as the PC version.

Both Pocket PC and Go versions have door-to-door navigation. You can download the latest speed camera locations from www.pocketgps.co.uk. Checking for updates and downloading the latest version will keep you up to date with new cameras.

You can find details of the products at www.tomtom.com. The TomTom Go 700, which includes door-to-door planning for the whole of Europe, can be bought for £550 including VAT, and the TomTom Go 500, which provides UK door-to-door and major European roads, is available for £470 including VAT. ☐



PC Hardware Annoyances

If you send our star letter, you'll receive a prize. This month's winner gets a copy of O'Reilly's *PC Hardware Annoyances*, which will help you fix any hardware problems your PC is experiencing. If you don't want to spend the rest of your life troubleshooting, keep this book next to your PC along with the latest copy of *Computer Shopper*. You will find that all your PC woes disappear.